



Prospects & Perspectives

The Collapse of Gaddafi's Authoritarian Rule: Domestic, Regional and International Implications

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I. Introduction

The year 2011 started with the Jasmine Revolution and the exit of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, followed by protests in Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and Syria, and the fall of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and reached its climax in late October when the world's longest serving non-monarchical leader, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, was killed in Sirte.

The death of Gaddafi is significant in three ways. First of all, the end of big-man politics is always followed by widely predicted confusion, which in the case of Libya, raises several questions: How will post-Gaddafi Libya evolve? Will democratization take root, or will Libya fall into chaos in a power vacuum? What kind of national and political systems will be created to meet the aspirations of the Libyan people? What are some of the issues involved in a post-conflict society like Libya?

Second, with the death of Gaddafi, what kind of response should the current authoritarian regimes in the region choose when confronted with

peaceful demonstrations requesting democratic change? Should they follow the route of exile like Ben Ali, or should they continue resistance like Gaddafi, thus risking their own lives in the process? Should they make concessions in the hope that cooptation will enable them to survive this Arab Spring?

In addition, does the victory of the "rebels" in Libya against an entrenched dictator like Gaddafi mean that the Jasmine Revolution and the Arab Spring will pick up momentum and spread to the entire MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region and beyond, say even to Muslim-dominated Central Asia, where authoritarian regimes prevail?

Finally, the French-led UN air attack played a decisive role in the outcome of Libya's civil war; it not only rescued the rebels from defeat by Gaddafi but also changed the momentum and turned the tide in the rebels' favor. Was this a valid application of the responsibility to protect (R2P) principle or a revival of Western intervention in the region? Was this a strategic move that France carried out in order to restore its historically strong presence on the continent,





which has been considered a *chasse gardée* of France but now is within China's growing sphere of influence?

II. Domestic Implications

During his 42-year-long reign, Colonel Gaddafi showed no interest in democracy or in administering the most indispensable part of a democracy, i.e., elections. The lack of prior experience with democracy means that the National Transition Council (NTC) or any political authority put in place will have *carte blanche* in drafting a constitution and designing national and political systems.

Gaddafi's biggest contribution to modern Libya was the creation of a nation-state based on tribal communities. Without his charismatic leadership holding this traditionally loose society together, will the country fall into a period of anarchy while it searches for order and stability? With this possible scenario in mind, it is imperative that the NTC draft a constitution that can accommodate different aspirations and cultural specificities of Libyan society, such as federation, tribal representation in the parliament and judicial pluralism.

Gaddafi's dictatorial rule definitely left Libyans with little inclination to embrace a strong president with absolute power. With the appointment of an interim prime minister in later October, a parliamentary system may be preferable to a presidential one. Still, we cannot rule out a political system modeled after the French semi-presidential design of the Fifth

Republic.

In addition to the political design (national system, political system, electoral system etc), the greatest challenges for post-conflict Libya are disarmament and demobilization (D & D). With so many weapons easily available and others unaccounted for, the NTC needs to earn the confidence of different anti-Gaddafi forces and proceed with disarmament immediately. The demobilization process is likely to proceed when both public and private sectors are able to provide sufficient jobs or training programs leading to employment. Unless the political situation stabilizes, this prospect is not likely to become reality.

Implementing D&D and drafting the new constitution should be followed by a national poll resulting in a democratically elected new government, which in turn will need to deal with questions of post-conflict justice. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) should be established to investigate the political excess and human rights violations that occurred during the Gaddafi era. How can Libyan society achieve reconciliation without compromising on justice? This kind of psychological reconstruction sometimes is more important than the physical one because without a reconciled society, the possibility of recurring violence cannot be ruled out, resulting perhaps in a vicious cycle of conflict.

III. Regional Dimension

If Gaddafi had succeeded in quelling the rebels during the civil war, other dictators in the region



would have been emboldened to hang on to power. When Ben Ali chose to go into exile, some of the region's dictators facing similar challenges may have concluded that he gave up power too quickly. Then came the fate of Mubarak, which may have made Gaddafi more determined to fight the popular protest movement with full military force instead of trying to negotiate a quick exit. Now that the hardline approach of Gaddafi has met its ultimate defeat, Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh and Syria's Bashar al-Assad must figure out how they should respond to the democracy movements in their respective countries.

Yemen was one of the first Arabic nations outside North Africa to experience civil unrest. Saleh promptly responded by announcing three nos: no extension, no inheritance, no resetting the clock. He also invited the opposition to join his government. Nevertheless, he failed to placate the protesters. Saleh was viewed as vulnerable during the months that followed and was even injured in a rocket attack in June. There were pressures for him to step down when he took a medical leave in Saudi Arabia, but Saleh returned in three months and appeared to be entrenched until the fall of Gaddafi. With Yemeni journalist Ms. Tawakul Karmen winning the Nobel Peace Prize in October, Saleh's staying in power became an intolerable thorn in the eyes of international community. No wonder the day after Gaddafi's death, the United Nations passed a resolution calling for Saleh's resignation. So far, Saleh has not heeded the call. He continues to play up the threat of Al Qaeda on the Arabic Peninsula and hopes the fear of a power vacuum will be sufficient to relieve some of the pressure aimed at ending his rule.

Syria's Assad still has his defenders and is

trying to retain his tight grip on power despite the departure of Gaddafi in Libya. For months, the Arab League has been busy working out a deal to end the violence in Syria. Its proposed peace plan, which includes the release of prisoners, the withdrawal of security forces from the streets and talks between the government and opposition, was accepted by Syria in early November. Obviously, Assad knew that, in the aftermath of Gaddafi's fateful demise, he had to at least pretend to be interested in working with the international community to solve the political impasse in Syria. However, with dozens of protesters killed by government forces in recent weeks, there is no reason to be optimistic that Assad will exit soon. The opposition may have been emboldened, but not enough to topple Assad without international logistical support.

IV. International Dimension

With France an apparent winner as a result of its intervention in Libya, Sarkozy has boosted the prospects of his own re-election in 2012. After years of dwindling French influence in Africa and expanding Chinese presence on the continent, it appears that France has stopped its retreat and is ready to restore its power there. The responsibility to protect (R2P) doctrine provided a useful excuse for French action in Libya.

NATO's "incomplete" mission in Afghanistan and the "failed" US-led campaign in Iraq had deterred Western powers from intervening militarily elsewhere. Will the case of Libya usher in a new era of international activism? Or was it





simply an exception inspired by Libya's geographical proximity to Europe and abundant oil resources, and unlikely to be duplicated again?

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